Measuring Public Expectations of Policing:
an evaluation of gap analysis

Nick Bland
Measuring Public Expectations of Policing: an evaluation of gap analysis

Nick Bland
Police Research Group: Police Research Series

The Home Office Police Research Group (PRG) was formed in 1992 to carry out and manage research in the social and management sciences relevant to the work of the police service. The terms of reference for the Group include the requirement to increase the influence of research and development work on police policy and practice.

A key area for the group is identifying and disseminating good policing practice. The aim of the Police Research series is to present results of externally funded studies, and those carried out by the Police Research Group, in a way that will inform policy and practice throughout the police service.

A parallel series of papers on crime prevention is also published by PRG, as is a periodical on policing research called ‘Focus’.

ISBN 1 85893 946 1

Copies of this publication can be made available in formats accessible to the visually impaired on request.
Gap analysis is a technique, originally developed in marketing, to measure customer expectations and perceptions of service. This report describes research which examined how the technique could best be used in the police context. The research identified few examples of the use of gap analysis by the police. And its scope was therefore widened to include a full-scale pilot of the technique in one division of a force. The success of this pilot suggests gap analysis can be most profitably used to identify public expectations, or priorities, of policing, and also any ‘gaps’ in the delivery of police services, where the police are failing to match public expectations.

The information that gap analysis provides can be used by forces and police authorities to inform policing priorities for inclusion in annual policing plans. And it can also be used to inform strategies aimed at tackling any gaps in service delivery. These strategies might aim to improve the service, better to match that expected by the public; or, where appropriate, aim to manage public expectations to accept current levels of service.

S W BOYS SMITH
Director of Police Policy
Home Office
August 1997
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank everyone from Avon and Somerset Constabulary, Dyfed-Powys Police, Surrey Police, West Mercia Constabulary, Avon Probation Service and London Underground who contributed to this research.

I would like particularly to acknowledge the role of Chief Inspector Martin Baker, Shrewsbury Division, West Mercia Constabulary in the successful conduct of the gap analysis pilot. The contribution of the Special Constabulary in Shrewsbury Division was also significant in this regard.

Finally, thanks are due to Jane Hirst who provided help, support and encouragement throughout the life of the project.

The Author

Nick Bland is a member of the Home Office Police Research Group.

PRG would like to thank Dr Michael Chatterton, the Henry Fielding Centre, University of Manchester, for acting as independent assessor for this report.
Executive Summary

Police forces currently use a range of methods, such as social surveys and Police Community Consultative Groups, to canvass local community views on policing priorities, or expectations. But forces also want to identify how well the policing service they deliver meets these community expectations. Gap analysis has been identified as a technique that forces could use to gather this information.

The report describes research to examine gap analysis and identify whether and how it could be used by police forces. To this end, the research examined what gap analysis meant in theory and practice; but identified only three forces that had partially used a form of the technique. We therefore widened the scope of the study to include two examples, in Avon Probation Service and London Underground, where the technique had been applied in its complete form. Given the lack of police examples, the research also involved a full-scale pilot of gap analysis in Shrewsbury Division, West Mercia Constabulary. The technique was used to examine whether community expectations differed between the rural and urban areas of the division, covering most of Shropshire.

Gap analysis was originally developed from market research in some private sector organisations as a technique to measure quality of service. It consists of two elements: a model of quality of service, based on the idea of quality ‘gaps’; and a method of identifying these ‘gaps’ and measuring the size of them. Our research focused on the second of these elements, the gap analysis method. This method comprises two stages: a qualitative stage using focus groups; and a quantitative stage using a survey questionnaire. Together, they are used to identify three elements:

- customer priorities: the elements of service most important to them;
- service failures: the elements of service with large quality gaps, where the provider is failing to meet customer expectations; and
- priority problems: the elements of service of most importance to customers but with large quality gaps, where the provider is failing to meet expectations.

Gap analysis can also be used to inform the development of ‘gap closure’ strategies to tackle these problems. These strategies are designed to:

- improve the level of service to match that expected by customers: an operational focus; or
- reduce or manage customer expectations to accept current levels of service: a marketing focus.

The three police examples of a gap analysis approach, discussed in the report, provide an indication of the potential of the technique. The cases of Avon Probation Service and London Underground usefully show how the results of gap analysis can be used to design gap closure strategies. The pilot in Shropshire provided an opportunity to test a complete version of the technique in the police context. Drawing on these examples, the report identifies three possible ways that forces might use gap analysis:

- to identify public priorities for policing;
- to judge quality of service in routine ‘service encounters’, such as at station enquiry counters, complementing quality of service surveys; and
- to compare force service standards against public expectations and perceptions of service delivery.
The successful outcome of the gap analysis pilot suggests it can perhaps be most profitably used to identify public priorities of policing. But many, if not most, police forces currently use 'traditional' public surveys to identify these priorities. Gap analysis differs in two significant ways:

First, it provides a way of measuring public priorities for many, very specific services (37 in the pilot). This provides a more comprehensive, inclusive and detailed picture of the public’s priorities.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the pilot showed that gap analysis can identify any areas where the police are failing to match public expectations, and measure levels of public knowledge about policing. These elements can then be used to:

- inform force policing plans;
- identify ‘gaps’ in the delivery of specific policing services; and
- inform ‘gap closure’ strategies, taking an operational or marketing focus.
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of figures</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of tables</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The report</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is gap analysis?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gap model</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gap analysis method</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Examples of the use of gap analysis</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'True' gap analysis: five cases</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the gap analysis cases</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap closure in Dyfed-Powys</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Piloting gap analysis</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap closure</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conclusions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific applications</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure No.</th>
<th>Caption</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Simplified gap model of quality of service</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>The process of gap analysis: an example</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Public priorities for policing, by ranking ‘bands’</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Levels of public ignorance of police services</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table No.</th>
<th>Caption</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Financial and human resource costs of gap analysis pilot</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

Continuing to provide a high quality service to their local communities is an ongoing concern for police forces. To help meet that challenge, forces, with their police authorities, use a range of methods to get the views of their local public about the policing service they receive. These methods include police community consultative groups (PCCGs), social surveys, focus groups, and, a more recent development in some forces, ‘consumer panels’. Their merits are considered in Police Research Series paper 22 (Elliott and Nicholls 1996).

As part of public consultation, forces and authorities are increasingly concerned to canvass local communities' views on policing objectives, or priorities. (It is now a statutory requirement for police authorities under the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994, consolidated by the Police Act 1996.) This information is important if forces are to make best use of their available resources to provide the policing service their local communities want, or expect. Forces currently use the range of methods listed above to gather this information.

Forces are not only interested in identifying what local communities expect from them. (And they may well already have a clear understanding of this.) They also want to identify how well they are meeting those expectations. And if they are failing to meet them, they want to know how. On this, they are likely to have a less clear understanding. Gap analysis has been identified as a technique that forces could use to gather this information.

It is unrealistic to anticipate that forces could meet all community expectations of service. It may be that some or even many expectations are based on an unrealistic or uninformed assessment of forces' capacity. Nonetheless, if gap analysis could identify what the local communities expect, and any areas the police are failing to meet expectations, forces could make informed decisions either to target realistic improvements in levels of service or, perhaps, to manage the level of public expectations.

This report describes research to examine gap analysis and identify whether and how it could be used by police forces. It was undertaken as part of an ongoing programme of work by the Home Office Police Research Group on quality of service issues, agreed with the ACPO Performance Management Committee.

---

1 Such a panel consists of a pool of people who have agreed to give their views, on various aspects of local policing, on a regular and ongoing basis. This arrangement provides a readily accessible sample of local opinion and offers the opportunity of assessing whether and how views change over time.
The research

The four main aims of the research were:

- to identify what gap analysis meant in theory and practice;
- to examine how, to-date, the technique had been used by police forces;
- to draw out the methodological and management issues around its use; and
- to evaluate how police forces could, in the future, use it.

There were two stages to the research:

Stage one

The initial stage of the research involved reviewing the literature on gap analysis and identifying police examples of its use. Because gap analysis was a technique new to the police service as a whole, there was no widely known network of forces using it. This meant that the research could not follow a pre-defined design and was, in essence, unstructured and exploratory. A previous scoping study had identified one force that had appeared to have tried the technique and two other forces were identified during the course of the research.

The three police examples were innovative attempts at applying the approach in the police context. However, because they could not strictly be considered as complete versions of the technique, the scope of the research was widened to include two such complete examples from other public services, namely, the probation service and London Underground.

The specifics of the five examples were examined in:

- written reports of the results of the gap analysis; and
- interviews, either with those who had actually applied the technique or with managers who had made use of the results.

In this way, the research explored both methodological and managerial issues surrounding the use of the technique.

Stage two

Given the lack of police examples using a complete version of gap analysis, it was decided to undertake a full-scale pilot application of the technique. It was undertaken in West Mercia Constabulary, which was interested, at the right time for this research, in exploring new methods of gathering local community views. The site of the pilot, Shrewsbury Division, covers most of rural and urban Shropshire. The division was interested in identifying whether community expectations differed
between the rural and urban areas. Gap analysis seemed particularly appropriate for this purpose.

The report

This report draws general conclusions about the gap analysis technique from the examples examined, with particular regard paid to the outcome of the pilot application. It does not provide formal evaluations of each one but aims to provide police forces with clear guidance on how best to make use of the technique.

Section 2 describes the theory and practice of gap analysis. Because the research focused on the practical element of gap analysis, this is given greater coverage.

In section 3, the five examples of gap analysis are discussed and compared. Despite significant variation in the forms of gap analysis used, four common elements are identified. These elements provide the framework for the discussion.

The pilot application of gap analysis is discussed in section 4. Conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of the technique, and guidance on its use, are outlined in section 5.
2. What is gap analysis?

The term ‘gap analysis’ sounds like another piece of management or marketing jargon. And the words it is composed of are so general, they give very little clue to its specific meaning. Even more confusing, the term is commonly used by writers of management literature to describe a number of very different ideas. For example:

- **in strategic planning**, ‘gap analysis’ is often used to describe the process of assessing how an organisation’s current position differs from its desired future position; and
- **in information strategy planning**, ‘gap analysis’ is an assessment of gaps in the technical skills of an organisation’s employees.

This report is not concerned with either of the above. The focus of interest is a technique used to measure quality of service. It is called ‘gap analysis’ because it identifies and measures ‘gaps’ between a customer’s expectations and perceptions of service. It was originally developed from market research in a number of private sector service organisations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1990). There are two elements to the technique:

- **a model** of quality of service, based on the idea of quality ‘gaps’; and
- **a method** of identifying these ‘gaps’ and measuring the size of them.

Our research focused on the second of these elements, the method of gap analysis. Before beginning to look at this method, however, it is worth looking briefly at the first element of gap analysis, the gap model of quality of service. The principles of this model are taught as part of the Managing Operations module of the Police Management Programme at Bramshill Police Staff College.

The gap model of quality of service can be understood as the background theory for gap analysis. But it may also serve a less academic end, as a practical framework for using the method of gap analysis. It could provide a guide for the application of the method and inform the subsequent interpretation of the results.

**The gap model**

At the root of this model is the idea that quality of service should be defined by the customer, and not those who provide it. Customers make a judgement on the quality of any service by comparing the service they receive with the service they expect. Thus, unsurprisingly, if a customer receives a poorer service than they expected, they will feel they received a low quality service. This difference, between the service received and the service expected, is described by the gap model of quality of service as a quality ‘gap’ (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985).
According to the model, this quality gap can vary in size and direction. If a customer receives a level of service very close to what they expected, the quality gap will be small. And if a customer receives a service far below what they expected, the quality gap will be large. Alternatively, a customer may receive a service which exceeds the level they expected. In this case the direction of the quality gap is in the opposite, positive, direction. And the customer feels they have received a quality service.

Putting the above in more formal terms, the gap model proposes that:

- customer perceptions of quality of service delivery are determined by the size and direction of the gap between the service they expect and the service they receive;

This is termed the ‘customer gap’. The gap model also shows how this gap can be affected by the actions of a service provider (see Figure 1). In summary form it proposes:

- the ‘customer gap’ is affected by the size and direction of four ‘provider gaps’. These gaps can occur in the way a service provider designs, delivers and publicises its service.
THE FOUR PROVIDER GAPS IDENTIFIED BY THE MODEL ARE:

**Gap 1** The gap between the service customers expect and the service that a provider's management think customers expect;

**Gap 2** The gap between the service that a provider's management think customers expect and the service standards set by the provider;

**Gap 3** The gap between the service standards set by the provider and the service it actually delivers; and

**Gap 4** The gap between the service a provider actually delivers and the service it publicises to customers.

The model shows how the various activities of a service provider together impact on the service delivered to customers. Note the importance of external publicity; it impacts both on the service customers expect, and on the service customers perceive they receive.

The gap model proposes that quality of service can be understood in terms of quality gaps. This suggests that the size and direction of these gaps can be measured. The gap analysis method was developed to do this. However, before going on to discuss this method, there are three specific aspects of the gap model which are important to understand.

First, remember the gap model is founded on a purely customer-defined notion of quality of service. The gap analysis method is based on this model and so does not provide an objective measure of quality of service. Rather, it serves only to measure the customer view of that service. Some service providers, such as police forces, may also wish to consider internal or professional measures of quality when assessing the overall quality of their service.

Secondly, note the use of the term ‘customer expectations’ in the model. This term does not refer to a customer’s prediction: what they think the service will be like in the future. Rather, it means the desires or wants of the customer: the service they think should be offered, not would be offered. It is perhaps more useful to think in terms of a customer’s view of ‘ideal service’ rather than expectations, though the model does not use this term.

Thirdly, note that quality of service is not the same as customer satisfaction. There is certainly an association between high quality of service and high customer satisfaction. But studies have shown that only up to 60% of any variation in customer satisfaction can be explained by changes in quality of service. Other factors such as choice and convenience may also have a significant impact on customer
satisfaction. Using the gap analysis method should not therefore be regarded as a substitute for customer satisfaction surveys. In one of the examples of the use of gap analysis, discussed in section 3, it continues to be used in tandem with customer satisfaction surveys.

The gap analysis method

The second element of the gap analysis technique is the methodology to measure the quality gaps identified in the model. It consists of two parts:

- an initial **qualitative** stage; and
- a subsequent **quantitative** stage.

Standard social research techniques are employed in both stages.

In the **qualitative** stage, focus groups, or in-depth face-to-face interviews, are conducted with the customers of the service provider to identify the aspects of the service most important to customers. These 'key aspects' provide the topics for further investigation in a survey questionnaire.

The survey questionnaire is used in the **quantitative** stage. The specific design of the questionnaire is central to gap analysis, and is one of its defining parts. Each 'key aspect' of service identified in the qualitative stage is broken down into more specific elements. These elements are used in the questionnaire which is given to a sample of customers. The questionnaire requires a customer to score each element: first, how important it is to them; secondly, how well the service provider actually delivers it. The difference between the two scores provides a measure of the quality gap for that particular element. A negative score indicates that, for that customer, the actual service they receive does not meet their expectations; a positive score indicates that the actual service exceeds their expectations.

To produce an overall picture of the quality of a service, the responses from the whole sample of customers are aggregated. Statistics are then calculated to give overall quality gap scores for each of the key aspects. From these, an index of a service provider's overall quality of service can be calculated. A negative index indicates that customers feel they receive a low overall quality of service, a positive index, a high overall quality of service.

The above process can usefully be illustrated by an example (see figure 2):
WHAT IS GAP ANALYSIS?

The above is a general account of the gap analysis method. The original developers of the technique also designed a specific version of the survey questionnaire called SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). It measures quality of service along five 'key aspects' of service the developers claim are central to customers of any service. The five 'key aspects' are:

reliability: performing the promised service dependably and accurately;

Figure 2: The process of gap analysis: an example

Stage 1: Qualitative

Focus groups with customers of a particular service provider identify:

- reliability; and
- responsiveness;

as two key aspects of the service.

Taking the key aspect of reliability, this is broken down into three specific elements:

- keeping accurate customer records;
- performing the service right first time; and
- honouring promises of service.

Stage 2: Quantitative

The above three elements of reliability are used as topics in the survey questionnaire, together with the elements of responsiveness and those of any other key aspects there might be.

When answering the questionnaire, a particular customer thinks keeping accurate customer records is very important and scores it correspondingly high in importance. However, they judge from experience that the service provider does not actually keep accurate customer records and so score it low for service received.

The service the customer receives does not match that expected. The difference between the two scores indicates, for this customer, a negative quality gap for keeping accurate customer records.

If, when the questionnaire responses from all the customers are aggregated, the overall quality gap score for keeping accurate customer records is negative, then gap analysis has shown that service provider has a significant problem with this aspect of its service.

The above is a general account of the gap analysis method. The original developers of the technique also designed a specific version of the survey questionnaire called SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988). It measures quality of service along five 'key aspects' of service the developers claim are central to customers of any service. The five 'key aspects' are:

reliability: performing the promised service dependably and accurately;
**WHAT IS GAP ANALYSIS?**

**responsiveness:** being willing to help customers and provide prompt service;
**assurance:** being knowledgeable and courteous and inspiring trust and confidence from customers;
**empathy:** giving caring and individual attention to customers; and
**tangibles:** the physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of staff.

SERVQUAL is presented as a tool that can be taken ‘off the shelf’ and used by a variety of organisations despite providing different services. It has been tested in a variety of service contexts and, with some adjustments, appeared to be successful. However, it is important to note that these five key aspects of service are all to do with the style or manner in which a service is delivered. The SERVQUAL questionnaire, therefore, only measures what customers feel about *how* a service is delivered. It does not measure what customers feel about *what* service, or services, are delivered. This is important when considering how gap analysis might be used by police forces.

Forces may well wish to measure whether their customers (the local community) feel they receive a reliable, responsive, assured service from the police. SERVQUAL, it appears, could be used to do this. However, forces are likely to be as concerned, if not more so, about the local community’s views about *what* services are delivered: their priorities for local policing. SERVQUAL, it appears, could not be used to do this. An important element of this research was to examine whether a form of gap analysis could be used by forces to identify community priorities for policing. This element was central in the design of the pilot application discussed in section 4.

**Conclusions**

In theory, gap analysis appears to offer a method for gathering useful, detailed information from customers about the service they receive. It specifically identifies three important elements, namely:

- **customer priorities**: the elements of service most important to them;
- **service failures**: the elements of service with large quality gaps, where the provider is failing to meet customer expectations; and
- **priority problems**: the elements of service of most importance to customers but with large quality gaps, where the provider is failing to meet expectations. The provider must prioritise these elements for remedial action.

Having identified the high priority problem areas, gap analysis could also be used to inform the development of strategies to tackle these problems. These strategies might be termed forms of ‘gap closure’, as they aim to close the quality gaps.
WHAT IS GAP ANALYSIS?

identified by gap analysis. Gap closure could be achieved through strategies designed to:

- increase the level of service to match that expected by customers: an operational focus; or
- reduce or manage customer expectations to accept current levels of service: a marketing focus.
Section 2 began by ‘unravelling’ the variety of meanings given to gap analysis in management literature. The early stages of this research found this tangle of meanings mirrored in forces. A variety of techniques and approaches were described as examples of ‘gap analysis'. And, at first sight, some of these approaches did seem very similar to ‘true’ gap analysis. This was particularly so for two approaches that, confusingly, share a number of common features with gap analysis yet should be clearly distinguished from it. This section begins by highlighting the characteristics that differentiate them from gap analysis.

The two approaches are:

- the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM); and
- cultural audit.

EFQM was founded in 1988 to promote the concept of ‘Total Quality’ to European businesses. It now has over five hundred members from most European countries and from the private and public sectors. Initially, only a few police forces were interested in the approach. Now sufficient forces are examining its potential to warrant establishing a National Police EFQM network.

There are two elements to the EFQM approach:

- a model of total quality management, the European Model for Total Quality Management; and

At first sight, these two elements look very similar to those of gap analysis discussed in the previous section. The models proposed by gap analysis and EFQM are both concerned with the issue of quality in organisations. And both approaches also propose a method for measuring aspects of quality. However, they differ fundamentally in the following three ways:

- First, they differ in scope. Gap analysis is concerned solely with quality of service: the interaction and relationship between an organisation and its customers. EFQM covers the broader area of quality management: this includes how an organisation manages its resources and key processes; and what impact its business has, not only on its customers, but on wider society.

- Secondly, they differ in focus. EFQM's method of assessment has a clear internal focus. It is a form of self-assessment that requires an organisation to judge its own performance. The results from EFQM may be used to compare ('benchmark’) performance with other organisations but no information is collected from customers or other external stakeholders. This is very different
to the external focus of gap analysis. Its method of assessing quality of service focuses on the customer; they judge an organisation’s performance.

- Thirdly, there is a distinct difference in the methods employed. There are a number of different methods for undertaking the EFQM self-assessment. Only one method involves the use of a questionnaire but its design is very different to that used in gap analysis. This questionnaire might better be understood as a quality management ‘check-list’.

While it is important to recognise how gap analysis and EFQM differ, it does not mean the two approaches are mutually exclusive. The research did not identify any examples of them being used together, but there appears no reason why they could not complement one another.

Cultural audit is another apparently similar approach to gap analysis. A number of forces have used it before implementing a programme of cultural change, to inform the process of that change. The audit aims to identify, and resolve, problems related to organisational culture. This involves identifying the existing culture of an organisation and comparing it with the culture to which the organisation wants to move. This comparison identifies the ‘problem areas’, where the difference between the two cultures is greatest.

Some people describe this work as the identification of cultural ‘gaps’, and the approach as a form of ‘gap analysis’. And the method used in an audit matches, in general terms, that used in gap analysis: both involve focus groups or interviews, and questionnaire surveys. One method of cultural audit shares a further likeness with the SERVQUAL method of gap analysis. Like SERVQUAL, this audit method uses pre-defined dimensions of measurement, which are supposed to be applicable to any organisation.

Despite these similarities, cultural audit and gap analysis differ in the following important ways:

- First, they differ in scope. Cultural audit specifically concerns the diagnosis and remedy of ‘problems’ in organisational culture. An audit might identify problems that impact on the quality of service delivered to customers but it might as likely identify problems relating to, for example, line management difficulties or employee dissatisfaction. The audit’s concern with culture is not the same as gap analysis’ concern with quality of service.

- Secondly, they differ in focus. Cultural audit deals primarily with an organisation’s employees and their views about work culture. Customers may be asked to judge an organisation’s culture but their views form only one part
of the overall work. Gap analysis is primarily, and often only, based on the views of customers.

‘True’ gap analysis: five cases

Despite the misleading variety of ‘false’ examples of gap analysis, the research did identify three police forces that had used the technique. Only one force labelled its work gap analysis, but all three cases involved central principles of the technique. To supplement these cases, we widened the scope of the research to include work conducted in two other public services. They provided useful additional data and an opportunity to compare how gap analysis worked in different contexts. The five cases were:

- Avon and Somerset Constabulary;
- Surrey Police;
- Avon Probation Service;
- London Underground; and
- Dyfed Powys Police.

The work in Avon and Somerset was conducted in 1995 by members of the force’s Performance Review Unit. A gap analysis approach, called a ‘gap assessment’, formed a part of a general survey of public attitudes. The main aim of the survey was to obtain data for the ACPO Performance Indicator (PI) on public satisfaction with perceived levels of foot and mobile patrol, and improve service delivery. The gap analysis element examined whether certain standards of service published by the force were acceptable to the public. The survey was repeated in 1997.

Surrey Police undertook a gap analysis project in 1993. They contracted the work to a consultancy that specialised in using the technique. The aim of the work was to examine the issue of public reassurance, with particular focus on what the public understood as, and expected from, ‘visible patrolling’. The work was conducted in four areas in Surrey but consisted of only the qualitative first stage of gap analysis.

Avon Probation Service (APS) contracted a business school consultancy to undertake a joint gap analysis project over 1993 and early 1994. The work aimed to assess how well APS met national standards and the expectations of its ‘customers’ as part of an overall redevelopment of the service. The project canvassed the views of all those working directly with the probation service: sentencers and magistrates, offenders, and APS staff. A customised version of the SERVQUAL form of gap analysis measured and compared the expectations and perceptions of these three groups.

London Underground (LU) has used gap analysis on an ongoing basis for the last couple of years. The same specialist consultancy, used by Surrey Police, examined
EXAMPLES OF THE USE OF GAP ANALYSIS

the expectations and perceptions of customers for a number of the underground lines. Gap analysis has also been used internally. It examined how well the restructured human resources department was meeting the expectations of employees.

Dyfed Powys Police implemented their 'gap analysis' in 1994. It is sufficiently different to the other four to merit separate discussion at the end of this section (see page 17 below).

It is perhaps best to examine these cases by reference to four general aspects, namely:

- the impetus for the work; particularly, the issues of concern which led to the work, and who decided specifically to use gap analysis, and why;
- the scope of the work; specifically, the issues the work aimed to tackle, and the nature of the 'gaps' measured;
- the method used; specifically, the practical form of gap analysis applied; and
- the outcome of the work; specifically, the results produced by the gap analysis, and whether and how the results were used in gap closure strategies.

The cases of gap analysis are examined below within the framework of these aspects.

Impetus for gap analysis

The impetus for the use of gap analysis differed between the police cases and those of APS and LU. The police tended to use the technique for discrete projects. (The case of Dyfed-Powys Police, discussed later in the section, is a significant variation from this.) In contrast, Avon Probation Service and London Underground were motivated to use the technique by longer-term managerial concerns.

In Avon and Somerset’s case, the primary purpose of the public attitude survey was to collect data to service the ACPO Performance Indicator (PI) on public satisfaction with the perceived level of foot and mobile patrol, and improve service delivery. But the force also used the survey as an opportunity to test the public’s views about some of the standards introduced as Citizen’s Charter Performance Indicators. A gap analysis approach was used to do this.

Surrey used gap analysis in a one-off fashion, to examine the issue of patrol for a possible review of the Surrey Police Charter. The force wanted to dig beneath the call from local communities for ‘more bobbies on the beat’ and to gain an improved understanding of what they expected from ‘local visible policing’. It hoped the results of the work could inform the longer-term development of visible patrol ‘sites’. A consultancy specialising in gap analysis was contracted to undertake the work.
The impetus for the use of gap analysis by Avon Probation Service was a concern among senior management to develop a more customer-oriented service. To inform this development, they wanted to examine how well APS met the expectations of its ‘customers’. But they wanted to use an approach that could also measure the performance of APS against national standards of service. They chose gap analysis because some knew of the technique from Masters in Business Administration (MBA) course study.

London Underground wanted to supplement its customer satisfaction measures with an approach that would measure customer expectations and perceptions of service. It also wanted to compare (‘benchmark’) its service with that provided by rival operators. Gap analysis was first piloted on a limited scale to compare (‘benchmark’) LU’s performance on a particular route against a rival operator. This proved a success and so LU used it more widely across the network.

Scope of gap analysis

There are some interesting similarities and differences in the scope of the work tackled using gap analysis. The police forces only used it to gather views from the public. APS and LU, however, also used it to obtain the views of staff. In three of the cases, gap analysis was used to compare expectations and perceptions of service. However, the Avon and Somerset Constabulary case compared public expectations with service standards rather than perceptions. Avon Probation Service also used it to compare its customers’ expectations with service standards but in addition to, not instead of, customer perceptions.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary used a gap analysis approach to compare public expectations with specific force standards regarding response times. It examined whether the speed the public expected for telephone ‘pick-ups’ (999 and non-emergency) and letter replies, matched the standards set by the force.

Surrey Police was also interested in certain force standards. However, rather than assess existing ones, it wanted possibly to develop new standards for assessing patrolling performance. It only used gap analysis, therefore, to identify the public’s expectations of visible patrolling and assess how well the force met them.

Like Avon and Somerset Constabulary, APS used gap analysis to examine standards, but in this case set at the national level. It measured how well the service met both these standards, and the expectations of its customers. The process involved two customer groups: offenders and sentencers (judges, magistrates and magistrates’ clerks). The views of APS staff were also included.

LU used gap analysis to measure the expectations and perceptions of its customers at the level of individual ‘business units’ (segments of the network with devolved
management responsibilities). Like APS, LU also used gap analysis with its staff, but internally, to examine how well the human resources department met staff expectations, rather than externally, to compare the expectations of staff and customers.

**Method used**

A ‘pure’ application of gap analysis involves first the qualitative stage, involving focus groups or interviews, followed by the quantitative stage, involving a survey. In the police examples, only one of these stages was conducted. The APS and LU cases involved both stages.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary used a gap analysis design, termed ‘gap assessment’, in one section of a general public survey. It asked survey respondents to give the time (in seconds for telephone response, days for letter response) in which the police should respond. The aggregated responses were compared with force standards for response times to calculate the proportion of the public satisfied with those standards.

Surrey Police had planned to undertake both stages of gap analysis but resource constraints limited the work to the first qualitative stage. The specialist consultancy conducted four focus groups, supplemented with some face-to-face interviews, in rural and urban parts of the county.

APS used both stages of gap analysis. The first stage involved focus groups with staff, and interviews with sentencers and offenders. This provided data to develop two survey questionnaires, one for each customer group. They were used to survey the relevant customer group more widely. Probation officers were also surveyed, using a composite of the two questionnaires, to measure how well the officers understood the different expectations of the customer groups.

LU also used both stages of gap analysis. First, in-depth interviews were conducted with almost a hundred customers, representative of the different passenger types, such as commuters, tourists and ‘leisure users’. From these, a ‘gap analysis’ interview schedule was designed and used, in the second stage, for over two thousand telephone interviews.

**Outcome of gap analysis**

The results that gap analysis produced and the final outcome of the work also differed between the police examples and those of APS and LU. In the police cases, the use of gap analysis led to limited outcomes that did not involve gap closure. For LU, gap analysis results informed specific improvements in service and, for APS, major organisational change. Both of these involved the use of gap closure strategies.
It is perhaps best to regard Avon and Somerset’s use of gap analysis as an innovative pilot of the technique. The principal outcome of the work was thus a successful use of the technique to compare public expectations with standards for response times. The force are seeking to install a new command and control system and so any further work on standards of response is being held back until this has been developed and installed.

Surrey was critical of the outcome of its experiment with gap analysis. The force felt that the final report produced by the consultancy did not provide it with significantly new information on the public’s views of visible patrolling.

The gap analysis in APS identified specific quality gaps, areas that its customers felt were given inadequate importance by probation officers. For example, it found that whereas probation officers placed emphasis on counselling, the offenders wanted practical advice and support to acquire accommodation and employment.

Prompted by the results of the gap analysis, APS implemented a number of quite major organisational changes. The service moved from a structure based on geographically structured teams to one based on functional teams. There was also a change in culture with probation officers encouraged by senior management to take a more customer focused approach. Resources were reallocated to help develop employment training initiatives, supported by local businesses.

The strategies for change implemented by APS focused on the organisation and delivery of its service. From a gap closure perspective, these strategies take an operational focus to closing the gaps.

LU used gap analysis to identify specific areas of service where it was failing to meet customer expectations. With this information, LU could target resources and design specific initiatives to close the gaps. As in APS, there was an operational focus to the initiatives aimed at gap closure. LU plans to continue to use the technique. It will monitor periodically its quality of service, in tandem with other quality measures such as customer satisfaction surveys, and the use of ‘mystery shoppers’.

**Evaluation of the gap analysis cases**

Neither police force undertook a formal evaluation of their use of gap analysis. Given the historical nature of the evidence, it is difficult at this distance to draw any firm conclusions about these initiatives. But it would be unfair to criticise either attempt as both were, essentially, ‘first efforts’ at using the technique in the police context. They might best be regarded as ‘experiments’; as such, it is unsurprising that neither led to significant outcomes. But what lessons can be drawn from them?

---

2 anonymous assessors posing as customers who mark the quality of service along set criteria
Avon and Somerset’s use of the technique suggests that a form of gap analysis could offer a useful method of comparing standards of service delivery against public expectations. Since it was used to examine a very specific set of service standards, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions about the viability of its use across the full range of police service standards. It may well be inappropriate for some force standards, such as detection rate, as the public would be unable to make an informed assessment (how would they know whether a detection rate was good or bad?). Avon and Somerset chose not to use the technique in this way.

Note also that Avon and Somerset did not employ the qualitative stage of gap analysis. This could have been used to identify whether response times were a ‘key aspect’ of service for the public. In this case, however, the force wanted to examine public expectations in relation to a pre-determined standard. If a force was planning to develop further standards, or to redevelop current standards, applying the qualitative stage of gap analysis would be productive. It would offer the opportunity to assess the importance to the public of specific aspects of service and their related standards.

It might be useful to supplement information on standards by examining public perceptions. In this case, it would have identified whether there was a difference between the force standard for response times and how fast the public perceived the force responded. To obtain this information would require a targeted ‘customer’ survey. In the general public survey used by Avon and Somerset, there would have been an insufficient number of respondents who had recently contacted the police (by telephone or letter) and who could therefore judge the speed of response by experience.

The apparent failure of gap analysis in Surrey is significant and merits discussion. Once again, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. There are perhaps four (not mutually exclusive) possibilities:

- more useful information may have been obtained had the second quantitative stage been conducted;
- the specific area of police patrol may not have been amenable to gap analysis. Police use of visible patrol is likely to be poorly understood by the public. A high proportion will have little knowledge or direct experience of its function. In this case, therefore, members of the public may have had difficulty in articulating what they expected;
- interviews with some of the project members suggest that the consultants may have inadequately understood the force’s expectations for the work. This may well have been exacerbated by changes in consultant personnel during the life of the project; or
the work undertaken by the consultants may have been of inadequate quality. Certainly the report that was produced from the work did not present any form of detailed analysis or interpretation and drew only general conclusions.

The cases of LU and APS provide good examples of the potential effectiveness of gap analysis. The impetus behind the use of gap analysis in both cases stemmed from wide-ranging, strategic managerial concerns and, appropriately funded, this led to significant outcomes.

Gap closure in Dyfed-Powys

Dyfed-Powys Police merits specific attention because it has implemented a strategy involving elements of ‘gap closure’. The strategy was informed by findings from a survey of public perceptions of the force conducted in 1994. The survey did not follow a gap analysis design but still identified significant gaps in public perceptions related to:

- estimated local crime levels: the public over-estimated local levels of burglary, car and violent crime;
- assessment of crime risk: the public greatly over-estimated the chance of being a victim of crime;
- knowledge of force’s achievements: few people had seen the local policing charter or were aware of the force’s quality initiatives; and
- knowledge of police responsibilities: a significant minority held the police responsible for prosecution decisions.

The survey also indicated most of the public wanted more information from the force. Its findings informed the development of a ‘marketing’ strategy, one element of the force’s ‘policing 2000’ corporate strategy. Marketing should not be understood as simply ‘glossier’ Public Relations (PR), but involves delivering a service oriented to the needs of the customer. The marketing strategy in Dyfed-Powys has three main objectives:

- reassure the public;
- change attitudes and behaviour of sections of the community; and
- convey a positive perception of the force to the public.

The key elements of the strategy designed to meet these objectives are:

- managing public reassurance: the force has produced local crime prevention packs for people buying new cars and new houses, and for people going on holiday. The packs combine crime prevention advice with positive messages...
about local crime levels and the relatively low chance of being a victim of crime;

- emphasising value for money in the services provided by the force: the force policing charter highlights that insurance savings (compared to the national average) due to low crime rates probably equal the annual policing charge for each resident. The charter presents this charge as a daily cost, ‘less than a pint of milk’.

- identifying particular ‘customer groups’ to target specific messages and strategies: the Welsh-speaking community is a target for this strategy.

- informing the public about the reasons for specific police actions: the force, for example, uses periodic vehicle checks to combat drug trafficking and criminal ‘tourists’ visiting the force area. Anyone who is stopped is given a ‘receipt’ indicating who stopped them and why. It also explains why the force has the policy, and the effect it has on crime;

- educating the public about the police role in the criminal justice process: in public statements, for example, the force has highlighted the role of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in prosecution decisions; and

- publicising widely the achievements of the force.

The above provides a useful illustration of the use of a gap closure strategy by a police force. In this case, the gap between public expectations and perceptions is being tackled through a marketing focus to gap closure. This has not meant that the focus is solely on reducing or managing public expectations. Many of the gaps highlighted in the survey resulted from public ignorance or mis-perception of the work of the force. These gaps are being tackled by publicising the work and achievements of the force better to inform the public.

None of the police examples discussed in this section have involved the complete use of gap analysis. In the second stage of the research, we therefore piloted the full use of the technique. The pilot was designed to test whether gap analysis could be used specifically to identify whether public priorities for policing differed between rural and urban locations. This is discussed in the following section.
Given the limited and partial use of gap analysis in the police context, we decided to conduct a pilot of the full version of the technique. This was undertaken in collaboration with West Mercia Constabulary which, at the right time for this research, had begun to explore new methods of gathering local community views to inform the annual policing plan. Consequently, the pilot ran between November 1996 and March 1997.

The site of the pilot, Shrewsbury Division, covers most of rural and urban Shropshire. The division was particularly interested in identifying whether the community in rural areas expected different services from the police than the urban community. Gap analysis seemed particularly appropriate for this purpose.

Method

The pilot involved both parts of the gap analysis method:

- the initial qualitative stage; and
- the subsequent quantitative stage.

We contracted the qualitative stage to BMRB International Ltd. They conducted four focus groups, each with approximately eight participants. Two groups were held in Shrewsbury, the county town of Shropshire, to obtain the views of ‘urban’ dwellers. Another group was held in Ludlow and also in Oswestry, smaller towns situated in the north and the south of the county respectively, to obtain the views of rural dwellers.

Participants were randomly selected by local professional recruiters but according to a ‘quota’ set for each group. The quotas were based on a mix of ages (18-65+ years), lifestages (single, married/living together, with children), social classes (B, C1, C2, D and E) and gender. The recruiters visited homes in the local area for each group, using a ‘screening’ questionnaire with potential participants to ensure they matched the quota requirements of the group. To help recruitment, potential participants were told that light refreshments would be provided and were also offered an incentive of £15 to take part. Help with transport to the venue was also offered, if needed. The incentive was particularly important to ensure the participation of people who would not otherwise have done so. This selection process was designed to ensure that the participants represented a broad cross-section of the divisional population. In this way, the groups aimed to capture, as far as possible, the broad range of views on local policing.

The groups were held in two local community centres and, in Shrewsbury, a small conference room in a hotel. The discussions were led by a professional focus group moderator. They began with a general discussion about the area, and issues of current local concern, before the moderator focused discussion on attitudes towards,
and views of, the local police. From this discussion we could identify the specific policing services the participants wanted most from their local police: the ‘key aspects’ of service. It was crucial for the success of this stage that the moderator could skilfully lead the groups without imposing her own opinions or views.

The self-completion survey questionnaire used in the quantitative stage followed a gap analysis design, and covered 37 specific policing services, ‘key aspects’ of service, identified by the focus group participants as important. The questionnaire thus solely reflected a local ‘public view’ of policing. Consequently, while it covered most aspects of policing, there were some significant exclusions. For example, none of the 37 services related to police action against crimes of violence or sexual violence. The absence of these crimes does not indicate, however, that the focus group participants viewed such crimes as unimportant. More likely, it reflects the minor impact these crimes have on their lives, due to the relative infrequency of such crimes in the division.

The questionnaire was designed to measure, for each of the 37 policing services:

- its level of priority for the public;
- the ‘performance gap’: how well the public think police meet their expectations; and
- the level of public awareness of the service.

The questionnaire was first tested with a small sample of people. This highlighted the need for some minor changes to the questionnaire design. Appendix A, available on request from PRG, contains a copy of the final questionnaire.

We used the questionnaire to survey a sample of the public in the division; the names (with addresses) were chosen at random from the Electoral Register. One thousand names were drawn proportionately from the four local authority districts covered by the division. This ensured that the sample was representative of the divisional population. Twenty people were subsequently excluded from the sample because they lived outside the divisional boundary.

The survey was publicised by the division through local newspapers and local radio. The aim was to publicise the aims of the survey and generate public support, prior to the delivery of the questionnaires, so respondents would be prepared and, hopefully, willing to take part. Members of the division’s Special Constabulary, dressed in plain clothes, delivered the questionnaires, by hand, over a weekend. Where possible, the

---

3 The representativeness of the sample was further improved by taking account of rural/ suburban/ urban population differences and the spread of ACORN household classifications.
Special Constables arranged to return a day or two later to collect completed questionnaires. Otherwise, they directed respondents to send completed questionnaires to a freepost address at force headquarters, from where they were forwarded to PRG.

Of the 980 questionnaires delivered, 629 were returned; giving a very good response rate of 64.2%. There are two primary explanations for the non-responses:

- approximately 70% occurred because individuals included in the sample no longer lived at the recorded address. This error was a function of the accuracy of the Electoral Register from which the names were sampled; and
- approximately 20% of the non-responses resulted from direct refusals by individuals to participate.

The remaining 10% of the non-responses occurred because people were either away or in hospital, too ill, or non-English speakers.

A comparison of age and gender profiles showed the sample was generally representative of the divisional population, taking account of some over-representation of 45-64 year olds and some under-representation of 18-44 year olds.

Results

Public priorities for policing

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to rate the importance of the 37 policing services by scoring them on a scale of one to seven, where one was the lowest rating and seven was the highest. Aggregating and averaging all the respondents’ scores gave an overall score for each service. The 37 services were ranked on the basis of these scores. We tested the statistical significance of the scores to check the validity of the rankings,4 but it was not possible to distinguish an individual ranking for each service. Instead, the services were ranked according to priority ‘bands’; the services in any one band considered an equal level of priority. There were 14 priority bands (see figure 3). It should be noted that this ‘banding’ of priorities is not a necessary outcome from the results. In this case, the scores for some services were so similar that they could not be distinguished in a statistically significant way and so had to be ‘banded’ together. But in future cases, it might well be possible to identify individual rankings for services.

The results indicated that the public’s top priority for the police was to tackle the sale of hard drugs. Two services tied for second priority: quick emergency response

---

4 The paired-samples t-test was used.
and stopping vandalism of property (not including motor vehicles). Nine services comprised the top four priority bands and included:

- five areas that might be regarded as ‘core business’: the sale of hard drugs, emergency response, the use of hard drugs, domestic burglary, thefts of motor vehicles; and
- one ‘quality of life’ issue: vandalism.

The other three services concerned street robbery, youths racing in cars, and drink drivers.

**Figure 3: Public priorities for policing, by ranking ‘bands’**

The ‘priority pyramid’

3. Use of hard drugs.
6. Patrolling town centres on foot
7. Organised gangs
12. Conduct regular road stops to check vehicle safety
13. Work in partnership with local agencies.
Performance gaps

The gap analysis also identified ‘performance gaps’ in the delivery of the 37 police services, as a measure of how well the public perceive the police meet their expectations. Questionnaire respondents scored police performance of the 37 services on the same one to seven scale as for priorities. The difference between the two scores gave a measure of the ‘gap’ as perceived by that respondent. Aggregating and averaging the gaps provided an overall ‘gap score’ for each service. Once again, we tested the statistical significance of the scores to check their validity and similarly ranked the performance gaps of the services in bands.

The results indicated the public perceived the police best met their expectations for the following services:

- working in partnership with other local agencies;
- dealing with speeding drivers;
- helping start Neighbourhood Watch (NW); and
- dealing with traffic accidents.

However, there were other services for which the public perceived the police were not meeting their expectations. They perceived the largest gap in police efforts to tackle vandalism of property. Four services tied with the second largest gap:

- dealing with youths racing in cars;
- dealing with under-age drinking in the streets;
- having a high visible presence on the streets of towns on weekend nights; and
- tackling vandalism of motor vehicles.

By putting together the two sets of results, it is then possible to identify the ‘priority problems’. These comprise the police services that have the highest public priority and, the public perceive, the largest performance gap. From the above results, two priority services were identified. They were, in descending importance:

- stopping vandalism of property; and
- dealing with youths racing in cars.

To put these results into context, respondents were also asked to make a general assessment of the performance of their local police. The vast majority of respondents (82.9%) felt the division did a ‘fairly good’ or ‘very good’ job.

Levels of public knowledge

The gap analysis questionnaire also provided a measure of public knowledge of the 37 policing services. If respondents felt ill-informed to judge police performance for any service, the question offered them a ‘don’t know’ option. Public ‘ignorance’ of
each service was measured by calculating the percentage of respondents taking this option.

The results (see figure 4, over) indicated high levels of public ‘ignorance’ of most aspects of policing. At the highest level, after police action against organised gangs, around 70% of the public were uninformed about four community-oriented policing services:

- working with local community groups such as youth groups;
- working in partnership with community groups to tackle specific problems;
- visiting secondary schools and ‘breaking down the barrier’ with teenagers; and
- holding regular public meetings.

This was perhaps a particularly surprising, and significant, finding. These services require direct involvement with the community and might be expected to be well known by the public. Besides, as potentially profitable exercises in public relations and ‘bridge-building’, the level of public unawareness is particularly significant. The specific problem of limited and partial representation of local communities at PCCG meetings (Elliott and Nicholls 1996) is, from these results, perhaps inevitable while such a high proportion of the public do not know the police hold such meetings.

One might have expected parents, with children of school age or older, to be significantly more knowledgeable about the two more ‘youth-oriented’ services: working with local community groups such as youth groups; and visiting secondary schools. However, this was not the case. Only five percent more parents were aware of police performance in these areas.

Interestingly, the public were best informed about three policing services related to road safety:

- tackling drink drivers;
- dealing with road traffic accidents; and
- dealing with speeding drivers.

Nonetheless, around a quarter of respondents were still unaware of police performance of these services. One could speculate on the reason why these are the most well known. It might be because they are the most ‘publicly visible’ police actions; there was not, however, a similar level of knowledge for visible patrol. Alternatively, it might reflect the impact of fairly regular, national advertising campaigns; though this would not account for the relatively high level of knowledge about the police dealing with road traffic accidents. Gap analysis cannot, unfortunately, provide any information to support or reject such speculation.
### PILOTTING GAP ANALYSIS

#### Figure 4: Levels of public ignorance of police services

![Bar chart showing levels of public ignorance of police services](chart.png)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Police Services</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key:**

- A: Target ringleaders of organised gangs
- B: Target organised gangs
- C: Work with local community groups
- D: Visit secondary schools to ‘break down the barrier’ with teenagers
- E: Prevent ‘no-go’ areas
- F: Target users of ‘hard’ drugs
- G: Visit schools to talk about dangers of drugs
- H: Target users of ‘soft’ drugs
- I: Undertake targeted operations against local problems
- J: Target sellers of ‘soft’ drugs
- K: Visit primary schools
- L: Help people run Neighbourhood Watch
- M: Tackle sale of alcohol to under-aged
- N: Deal with under-age drinking in pubs
- O: Deal with under-age drinking in the streets
- P: Tackle street robbery (‘mugging’)
- Q: Regularly conduct road stops
- R: Stop people vandalising property
- S: Tackle vandalism of motor vehicles
- T: Tackle theft from motor vehicles
- U: Tackle theft of motor vehicles
- V: Emergency response
- W: Tackle domestic burglary
- X: Tackle burglary of businesses and shops
- Y: Tackle drink-driving
- Z: Deal with road traffic accidents
- A': Dealing with people who drive above speed limit

**Note:** The above results are liable to a 95% ’confidence interval’ of ±4%. This means that for any single result, we can be confident that 95 times out of a 100 we would find that the level of public ignorance (i.e., the level for the divisional population and not just for the survey sample) lies in a band ±4% of that result. For example, we can be 95% confident that between 19-27% of the public are unaware of police performance in dealing with people who drive above the speed limit (service A').
Rural and urban differences

Further analysis of the survey results found the top policing priorities were, in general, the same for both rural and urban dwellers. The only two identified significant differences were:

- dealing with youths racing in cars, and tackling the use of hard drugs were both a higher priority for urban dwellers.

It was unsurprising to find these ‘typically urban’ problems having a higher priority in urban areas. Yet, apparently similar problems like mugging and vandalism did not. And the absence of any major differences in policing priorities between rural and urban areas had not been expected.

Rural and urban differences were also found in the size of perceived ‘performance gaps’, for some services. Urban dwellers perceived larger gaps in police performance for:

- tackling vandalism of property, and of motor vehicles; and
- tackling thefts of property from motor vehicles.

Whereas rural dwellers perceived larger gaps for:

- working with community groups; and
- holding regular public meetings.

Perhaps the most significant rural and urban differences were in levels of public knowledge. Analysis found that urban residents were, in general, better informed about policing; and significantly so about the following services:

- tackling street robbery (‘mugging’);
- stopping people fighting in the streets; and
- stopping people vandalising property.

However, rural dwellers were slightly better informed about some community-oriented services:

- holding regular public meetings;
- helping start NW; and
- helping run NW.

Differences due to gender and age

Further analysis also examined differences due to gender and age. This did not identify any statistically significant differences in priorities; but there were differences in perceived ‘performance gaps’. 
Males perceived larger performance gaps in the following six services:

- tackling thefts of motor vehicles;
- tackling vandalism of motor vehicles;
- tackling thefts of property from motor vehicles;
- tackling domestic burglary;
- tackling the sale of hard drugs; and
- tackling burglary of shops and businesses.

For most services, there was no significant difference, due to age, in the size of performance gap. However, ‘the young’ (18-44 years old) did perceive larger performance gaps in five services:

- dealing with under-age drinking in the streets;
- tackling the sale of hard drugs;
- dealing with under-age drinking in pubs;
- tackling vandalism of motor vehicles; and
- tackling organised gangs.

**Gap closure**

The strategies identified by the division to tackle issues identified by the gap analysis fall under the heading of *marketing* and *operational* ‘gap closure’ strategies.

The gap analysis identified that a high proportion of the public (up to 70%), even parents, was unaware of the work done by the local police in schools. The division is looking at *marketing* strategies to raise the profile of this work. The gap analysis also identified that a high proportion of the public (over 50%) was unaware of police action against drugs. The division aims to promote better the positive work they are already doing in this area, possibly including the publication of performance results.

The gap analysis identified tackling vandalism as a high public priority. Taking an *operational* focus to this issue, the division is now examining how better to manage and counter this problem. The recent introduction of a Crime Pattern Analysis system to the division might provide useful information to guide these efforts. A re-evaluation of the priority given to vandalism might also be required. Faced with competing demands on their time, operational officers might previously have given less attention to occurrences of ‘minor damage’. Gap analysis has indicated that the public regard it as a more serious problem.

The division also aims to use the results in the management of inter-agency partnerships. Gap analysis has highlighted areas most effectively tackled in partnership with other agencies or public groups such as Community Safety
Partnerships. The results from the gap analysis provide the division with evidence to argue for the importance of multi-agency approaches to some issues.

The initiatives described above are in the early stages of development, but they signify the division’s very positive response to the results of the gap analysis. Their successful implementation should only improve the, already high, levels of public satisfaction with the division’s performance.

West Mercia Constabulary is in the process of formally evaluating the outcome of the gap analysis pilot. Although this evaluation is not yet complete, the initial assessment is positive. For Shrewsbury Division, gap analysis has provided useful information to inform their policing plan, specifically:

- provided a quantitative ‘feel’ for public priorities;
- highlighted areas of publicly perceived, poor service delivery; and
- highlighted areas where the division needs to market or publicise its activities better.

The force is examining the possibility of using gap analysis in the other divisions, perhaps applying the technique in one division a year, in a rolling programme. This would provide useful information at the divisional level and should also identify any broader level changes in public opinion across the force.

Evaluation

By conducting the pilot, we were able to observe three specific elements of gap analysis, namely:

- the design of the gap analysis questionnaire;
- the measurement of public priorities; and
- the design, and conduct, of the survey.

Of these elements, the first two are central to gap analysis; the third is not, but relates to the particular way we conducted the pilot.

Design of the gap analysis questionnaire

The design of the gap analysis questionnaire does not follow the straightforward ‘question-answer’ format found in many survey questionnaires and there was the risk that this could be confusing for respondents. The questionnaire requires respondents to score specific policing services twice: first in terms of how important it is to them; and secondly, in terms of how well they feel their local police deliver it. There was a concern that respondents might be confused about this distinction, or have difficulty
translating their views into a numerical score. In addition, because it was a self-completion questionnaire, respondents were unable to query any difficulties they might have and had to complete the questionnaire solely on the basis of the written instructions provided. We therefore paid particular attention to providing clear and simple instructions, and included a ‘worked example’ of a completed question.

A ‘dip-sample’ of completed questionnaires indicated most people had completed them as directed. The small minority of respondents that appeared to have had problems had been unable to complete both parts of the questions, tending to leave the second part, the assessment of police service delivery, blank. These were taken as non-responses for the purpose of analysis.

There was also the risk that respondents would be unable to differentiate between services in terms of importance. Specifically, there was the danger that respondents would regard all policing services as important and so score all at the highest level. If this happened, it would provide no indication of how the public prioritised the services.

Once again, this concern was unfounded. Although a small minority of respondents did score all services at the highest level, the majority distinguished between them. All respondents tended to score the services towards the higher end of the range, indicating that respondents regarded all of the services as important.

The measurement of public priorities

In using gap analysis to measure public priorities for policing, we were also concerned that these may be based on an uninformed assessment of the police’s capacity. Indeed, as discussed, the findings from the gap analysis suggest very high levels of public unawareness. But at the same time, gap analysis provides a useful ‘antidote’ to the difficulty posed by public ignorance. In particular, the discussion data obtained from the qualitative, focus group stage can be used with the quantitative survey results to provide some understanding of why, and on what basis, the public prioritise specific services.

Design and conduct of the survey

Three aspects of the design and conduct of the survey are also worth noting, namely:

- the fieldforce;
- the questionnaire style; and

---

5 A telephone number at PRG was given on the questionnaire if respondents had any difficulties. This was an attempt to provide some ‘interactive’ guidance, if needed. In fact, only one person rang to check that they were completing the questionnaire correctly. Other people may well have been reluctant to use the number, however.
PILOTING GAP ANALYSIS

- the sample.

The fieldforce

Many large-scale public surveys, such as the British Crime Survey, are run using a professional fieldforce which conducts structured interviews with respondents using a pre-designed interview schedule. The fieldworkers are given a sample of addresses, often taken from the Postcode Address File (PAF), at which to conduct interviews and are trained to select someone from the address at random. For the pilot of gap analysis, the cost of employing such a fieldforce was prohibitive. At the division's suggestion the Special Constabulary was chosen to fill this role. Because it is not a professionally trained fieldforce, two aspects of the survey design, the questionnaire style and the sample, needed careful consideration.

The questionnaire style

The gap questionnaire was designed to be completed by the respondents on their own. This meant the Specials did not need to be trained in interviewing techniques and it also guarded against the possibility of ‘bias’. If the Specials had interviewed respondents it might have affected the responses they gave. Allowing respondents to complete the questionnaire in their own home and at their own time, ensured, as far as possible, that they gave their own opinions. Alternatively, the questionnaires could have been posted directly to the sample of names, but this would have resulted in a far poorer response rate. The Specials delivered and collected most of the questionnaires by hand which played a significant part in the achieved response rate.

The sample

The sample was drawn from the Electoral Register. This meant the Specials could be given a list containing both names and addresses and did not need to be trained in how to select a respondent at random. This allowed the interaction ‘on the doorstep’ to be kept simple and straightforward. The disadvantage is that the register is only updated once a year and so is less accurate than the PAF which is updated quarterly by the Post Office. At any time the information on the register can be between five and seventeen months old.

The design of the pilot balanced methodological rigour with financial resource constraints. The use of the Special Constabulary was an important element in that design, and the management of its participation was crucial. The commitment of its members was central to the success of the survey and it was important, therefore, that they were informed and involved at an early stage. A briefing meeting, attended

---

6 This is a file of postal addresses used by the Royal Mail. Researchers most often use the “Small User File” which lists delivery addresses normally receiving under 25 items of mail a day.
by members of PRG and divisional officers, was held with the Specials prior to the survey. This highlighted their role in the process, and also allowed them to raise any problems. If the process is well managed, as it was in the pilot, the use of the Specials can be very successful.

**Resource considerations**

Inevitably, the financial and human resource costs of conducting gap analysis are an important consideration. Assessments from the pilot suggest the technique is cost-effective and involves a manageable work-load, particularly when compared to large force-wide surveys. A breakdown of the main costs of the pilot is given in Table 1.

**Financial costs**

The primary financial cost (accounting for 60% of the total) was for the conduct of the focus groups. We contracted this work externally to a professional, experienced group moderator to ensure the groups would obtain the quality and type of information required. This was crucial because the information was used to design the questionnaire. However, if the force was to repeat the gap analysis in other divisions, this element need not necessarily be repeated, so saving these costs. Another division would only need to conduct some focus groups (and not necessarily as many as the four used in the pilot) if it expected some community expectations to be significantly different. And these groups would be cheaper if they were run by appropriately trained or experienced force employees.

In other forces, it is likely that the specific range of community expectations of police services will differ somewhat. While one would expect police action against domestic burglary to be a common public expectation, it is likely that some other expectations would differ between, for example, metropolitan and provincial force populations. Other forces considering using the technique might, therefore, be best advised to calculate the ‘development’ costs of any first use of the technique to include the use of focus groups.

The other significant cost attached to the focus groups is the incentives paid to the participants. The ‘going rate’ for this tends to be about £10 an hour and so, for the pilot, participants were paid £15 for about one and a half hours discussion. The use of incentives is important to ensure participants are representative of the population. It is likely some people would take part in a group discussion without payment, but others would likely not. Using incentives ensured both groups were included.
### Table 1: Financial and human resource costs of gap analysis pilot

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Cost (£)</th>
<th>Work-days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus groups</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.5**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment for, and conduct of, groups, and written report</td>
<td>4,900*</td>
<td>0.5 x 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venue hire, refreshments and incentives</td>
<td>496</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>5,396</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Survey</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of questionnaire</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing of survey sample</td>
<td>920*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Printing questionnaires</td>
<td>755*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefing meeting</td>
<td></td>
<td>3***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Briefing/survey materials</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>0.5 x 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data input</td>
<td>330*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis and production of report</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-total</strong></td>
<td>2,825</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total cost</strong></td>
<td>8,221</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: all work-days relate to PRG research staff unless noted otherwise.

*Contracted externally **Includes 0.5 divisional officer days ***Includes 2 divisional officer days
The other main costs incurred were for:

- The drawing of the survey sample; it was drawn from the Electoral Register by a professional organisation specialising in this work. It is crucial the sample is drawn correctly to ensure the validity of the survey results and, in most cases, this will require the use of such an organisation.

- The printing of the questionnaires; these were printed so they had a professional, high quality appearance. This indicated to respondents the importance of the survey and encouraged them to complete it.

- The data input; this was contracted externally due to time constraints but it could, otherwise, have been conducted by PRG or divisional staff. Even so, the cost of contracting the work was extremely competitive when compared to the human resource costs of using internal staff.

**Human resource costs**

The human resource costs are deliberately recorded only in work days. Clearly, the equivalent staff salary costs will depend on the rank/position of the staff involved. The primary human resource cost for the pilot related to the use of divisional Special Constables to deliver and collect the survey questionnaires. This cost is not included in the above table because of their unpaid status as volunteers. Nonetheless, their involvement in the survey required individuals to give significant time. About eighty Specials took part in the pilot, most delivering a batch of ten questionnaires, but some delivering up to forty. The total time commitment from the Specials was about eighty ‘work days’. The attendance of PRG staff and divisional officers at the briefing meeting for the Specials was significant in highlighting the importance of the survey and the commitment of divisional management.

The other main costs related to the design of the questionnaire, the analysis of the results and the production of the written report. The questionnaire was designed by an appropriately trained PRG researcher but was still time intensive precisely because it was a pilot of the gap analysis design. If gap analysis was used subsequently by the force in other divisions the same questionnaire could be used, with adjustments to take account of any divisional differences, resulting in time savings. But if the questionnaire was designed ‘from scratch’, it is likely it would take at least as long as in the pilot. In either situation, it is important that the work is undertaken by someone with appropriate knowledge and experience of questionnaire design. PRG has produced guidance in the use of surveys by managers which includes an element on questionnaire design (Hibberd 1994).

The time taken to analyse the results and produce the report is unlikely to differ much in any further applications of the technique.
5. Conclusions

Sections 3 and 4 have presented examples of the use of gap analysis by police forces, and in two other public services. From these examples, it is possible clearly to identify how police forces should consider using the technique. But they also need to be clear about the general strengths and limitations of the methodology. There are two main strengths:

- the technique of gap analysis is founded on a gap model of quality of service. This model relates customer assessments of quality of service to the way a service provider designs, delivers and publicises its service. The findings from the pilot gap analysis have shown how this relationship works in practice. If forces are to make best use of gap analysis, they may need a clear rationale for its use and a guiding framework for the analysis and interpretation of the results. The gap model of quality of service appears to provide this; and

- gap analysis provides a quantitative measure of quality of service. This yields a number of benefits:
  - it allows a service provider to produce a baseline measure of quality of service;
  - customer expectations and perceptions can be monitored over time; any significant changes should be indicated by changes in gap scores; and
  - the success of gap closure strategies can be directly measured through changes in gap scores.

However, there are two aspects of gap analysis which limit its use. They highlight that police forces should not regard gap analysis as the quality measure but as one measure best used in tandem with others. It provides a useful complement, not substitute, for other consultation mechanisms.

- A service provider's performance often varies at different times of the day or week. Measuring average performance, as gap analysis does, may be misleading because it tends to mask serious problems in service delivery at certain times, such as peak demand. This issue is of particular relevance to police forces as demand for their services fluctuates greatly. There is thus the possibility that the quality of some aspects of service may deteriorate at times of high demand. Gap analysis would be unlikely to identify this deterioration.

- Gap analysis adopts a customer-defined notion of quality of service. While police forces have a responsibility to attend to public assessment of their service, they may not wish to use only 'customer' based measures of quality of service.
Specific Applications

There are perhaps three possible ways that forces might use gap analysis:

- to judge quality of service in routine 'service encounters';
- to compare force service standards against public expectations and perceptions of service delivery; and
- to identify public priorities for policing.

The research did not identify any police forces using a form of gap analysis for certain routine 'service encounters', such as at station enquiry counters. However, there is no apparent reason why it could not be used in such situations. A questionnaire using a SERVQUAL-type design might provide a useful complement to current Quality of Service surveys. There must be some doubt, however, over its use in less routine 'service encounters', such as with crime victims, where the service provided is far more particular to the specific situation.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary and Avon Probation Service both used gap analysis to judge service standards against public expectations. Their experience suggests forces could use gap analysis to assess how well their standards match both the service expected by the public, and the service they feel they receive. However, the method may well be inappropriate for some force standards, such as detection rate, which would require the public to make an uninformed assessment. Still, accepting these limitations does not rule out its partial use.

The success of the gap analysis pilot suggests it can perhaps be most profitably used to identify public priorities of policing. But many, if not most, police forces currently use 'traditional' public surveys to identify these priorities. What does gap analysis offer that they do not?

First, it provides a way of measuring public priorities for many, very specific services (37 in our pilot). This provides a more comprehensive, inclusive and detailed picture of the public's priorities.

Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, the pilot has shown that gap analysis can identify areas where the police are failing to match public expectations, and measure levels of public knowledge about policing. These elements can then be used to:

- inform force policing plans;
- identify 'performance gaps' in the delivery of specific policing services; and
- inform 'gap closure' strategies, taking an operational or marketing focus.
CONCLUSIONS

Although not tested by the pilot, the APS and LU examples suggest forces could also use gap analysis to measure the expectations and perceptions of their staff. For example, the technique could provide a useful way of assessing how well the priorities of officers delivering the policing service ‘on the ground’ match those of the public.

The cases discussed in the report have provided an indication of the potential of gap analysis. But police forces have yet fully to test the viability of the technique. It is hoped that the findings from this research will allow forces to make informed decisions about how, where, and whether to use it.
REFERENCES

References


REFERENCES

RECENT POLICE RESEARCH SERIES PAPERS
